

VZCZCXRO5273
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEH KI #0530/01 1350831
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 150831Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6123
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000530

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [CG](#)
SUBJECT: DRC SENATE GIVES VOICE TO POLITICAL OPPOSITION

REF: KINSHASA 528

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The DRC's Senate May 11 elected former Mobutu Prime Minister Leon Kengo wa Dondo as its president, making him the highest-ranking opposition politician in the GDRC. Senators also voted in the six other members of its leadership body, giving it a 4-3 split between members of the pro-Kabila Alliance for the Presidential Majority (AMP) and the pro-Bemba political opposition. The results were somewhat unexpected as the AMP holds a majority in the Senate. Kengo's election changes the political character of the Senate, with somewhat unpredictable results. Kengo's election will presumably decrease prospects for lifting immunity from prosecution of opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba, but Kengo could also share an interest in eventually marginalizing Bemba's influence. The election also clearly exposes the fragility of Kabila's supposed 70-plus member AMP majority in the Senate. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Senators elected Mobutu-era Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Leon Kengo wa Dondo to the Senate presidency May 11 in a 55-49 vote over President Joseph Kabila's former chief of staff Leonard She Okitundu (reftel). Kengo's election comes as something of political shock, as the pro-Kabila AMP coalition claims a substantial majority of seats in the 108-member Senate. She Okitundu had been favored going into the vote, particularly as an AMP rival, former Transitional Senate president Monsignor Pierre Marini, withdrew his candidacy May 10. A few days earlier, Okitundu had however expressed some concern to the Ambassador about being able to preserve AMP solidarity. The victory puts Kengo as next-in-line for the DRC presidency on an interim basis should the post be vacated.

¶3. (U) Kengo's election makes him the highest-ranking opposition figure in the GDRC. Though clearly associated with the political opposition, Kengo is officially an independent and did not run as a candidate of Bemba's Union for the Nation (UpN) alliance. In remarks to the press after his election, Kengo distanced himself from both the AMP and the UpN, saying he wanted to remain independent and listen to the arguments of both sides. He repeated this theme in his first remarks to the Senate as he took office May 14, asserting that he wishes to bridge the gap between government and opposition forces.

¶4. (SBU) Initial reaction to Kengo's victory has been mixed. Kinshasa newspapers, including the staunchly pro-Kabila "L'Avenir," have largely heralded Kengo's election as a sign of "balanced" government between the majority and opposition. Others within the AMP, however, have alleged Kengo bought votes, though such rumors -- targeting both Kengo and She Okitundu -- have been rampant. One AMP-aligned senator told

us May 11 there was "a lot of corruption, but the UpN did it better than the AMP." While some disappointed government supporters have blamed the international community, other acknowledge that other factors were in play as well, including Okitundu's relative weak political base, ethnic and regional factors, and a government coalition that is far from united.

¶15. (U) The Senate voted in six other executive officers, including two from the political opposition:

- 1st Vice President, Edouard Mokolo wa Pombo (Independent, aligned with AMP)
- 2nd Vice President, Mario Losembe (Forces of Renewal, aligned with AMP)
- Rapporteur, Modeste Mutinga (Independent, aligned with AMP)
- Deputy Rapporteur, Jean-Pierre Lola Kisanga (Independent, elected from RCD, aligned with opposition)
- Questeur (administrative/financial officer), Jean Fulbert Mabaya (Independent, aligned with opposition)
- Deputy Questeur, Ignace Ndebo Akanda (PPRD, aligned with AMP)

¶16. (U) The seven officers were sworn in May 14. The Senate will be the first governmental body to include the opposition in its leadership. All 59 ministers and vice ministers, plus the entire leadership of the National Assembly, are members of the AMP. Some opposition members have been appointed to head four of the Assembly's eight permanent commissions.

¶17. (SBU) Comment: Kengo's victory gives him a more elevated profile than fellow Senator -- and opposition leader -- Bemba. Kengo is a savvy political operator, with many years

KINSHASA 00000530 002 OF 002

of experience working in the upper levels of the former Mobutu regime. Widely unpopular and chased out of the country at the time of the ADFL 1997 assumption of power, Kengo now retains some political base in northern Equateur province, although his popular standing in the rest of the country is open to question. He is nothing if not a pragmatist, however, and how political alignments will change depends on his own agenda and ambitions, how the presidency and government choose to deal with him, and how the opposition ranks in parliament react to the new situation. End comment.

¶18. (U) Biographical information on Leon Kengo wa Dondo:

Leon Kengo wa Dondo, 71, was the longest-serving Prime Minister under Mobutu. Born Joseph-Leon Lubicz to a Polish father and Tutsi mother, he was appointed Prime Minister from 1982-1986, and moved to the post of Foreign Minister from 1986-1987. Mobutu again appointed him Prime Minister in 1988, where he served until the creation of the Sovereign National Conference (CNS) in 1990. The post-CNS transitional parliament selected him as Prime Minister in 1994. He remained in the post until the Congo's civil war began in late 1996, when Mobutu selected him to head a crisis cabinet focused on defeating Laurent Kabila. In April 1997 he resigned his position, one month before Kabila's army arrived in Kinshasa, and went into exile in Europe, during which he was charged in 2003 with money laundering in Belgium. He returned to the DRC in 2005. Born May 22, 1935, in Libenge, Equateur province, Kengo holds a law degree from the Free University of Brussels, after having studied business administration in Mbandaka. He was elected to the DRC Senate as an independent in January 2007 from Equateur.

MEECE